

FORM B - BUILDING

NRDIS 8/2/1984

Assessor's number
1-23

USGS Quad
Newburyport

Area(s)
C,L

Form Number
2005

Massachusetts Historical Commission
Massachusetts Archives Building
220 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, Massachusetts 02125

Town Newburyport

Place (neighborhood or village)

Address 31-35 Pleasant Street

Historic Name Griffin Block

Uses: Present Commercial

Original Commercial/Public Hall

Date of Construction 1889

Source Daily News, 10/26/1889

Style/Form Queen Anne

Architect/Builder J.M. Littlefield, Haverhill

Exterior Material:

Foundation Undetermined

Wall/Trim Brick, Terra Cotta

Roof Tar

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures

none

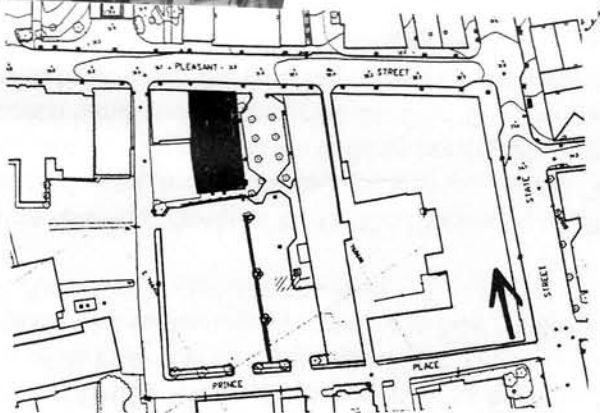
Major Alterations (with dates) c.1940 - cornice removed,
c.1990 - new windows & latest in a series of storefront
alterations

Condition good

Moved no yes Date

Acreage 5525 SF

Setting central business district



Recorded by Lisa Mausolf

Organization Newburyport Historical Commission

Date (month/year) May 1999

Follow Massachusetts Historical Commission Survey Manual instructions for completing this form.

BUILDING FORM (31 Pleasant Street)

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of the building in terms of other buildings within the community.

The former Griffin Block is a three-story brick block built in the Queen Anne/Panel Brick style in 1889, impressive for the variety of its brick and terra cotta detailing. Significant alterations to the building include the removal of the original cornice, the replacement of the original storefronts, new windows and the removal of the adjacent building resulting in the exposure of the Griffin Block's southeast elevation.

The first floor storefronts of the Griffin Block were totally replaced c.1990 with large display windows with anodized aluminum frames, metal bulkhead and transom panels. The second and third floors are ordered by two brick piers with incised centers which divide the building horizontally into a set of three windows flanked on each side by a pair of windows. Horizontal bands are located below the third floor windows and midway between the windows on the second and third floors. The wide band below the third floor windows is embellished by egg-and-dart moldings as well as continuous foliate medallions of at least ten different designs. Varying bands of terra-cotta tiles and moldings are visible on the second and third floors.

The windows on the second floor are all capped by low sandstone pediments resting on a square lintel with a rounded bottom which in turn rests on two corner blocks. The third floor windows are linked by a continuous lintel consisting of more steeply pitched gables with incised foliate detailing in the center. All of the original windows have been replaced with blocked-down modern units. Those on the second floor contain 6/1 sash while the third floor openings are filled with 6/6 sash with clear transoms. There are square terra-cotta tiles on the piers, aligned with the transoms. The central section of the building is capped by corbelling while the two outer sections are capped by low arches of graduated brick work. Historic photographs indicate that as originally constructed the building was capped by a prominent bracketed cornice with four larger brackets rising from the roofline. This heavy cornicework was apparently removed prior to the 1940s.

The left wall of the building is now bordered by Paul Tracy Square, dedicated 1983 and located on the site of the former building. The upper two stories of this elevation were originally punctuated by five pairs of arched windows with granite sills. Most of these openings have been bricked-in, several pairs are now filled with 1/1 sash. On the rear elevation many of the arched windows on the second and third floors retain their metal shutters. There are several surviving examples of what appear to be the original window configuration - a 2/2 window, which is capped by a two-light transom on the third story. A single-story brick addition is located at the rear of the block.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Describe the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.

On October 16, 1889 the Daily News reported that Mr. Eliphalet Griffin had opened a new and elegant block on Pleasant Street. Griffin was operating a dress goods store on Pleasant Street as early as 1849 and was on State Street selling dry goods in 1851. Shortly thereafter he must have left Newburyport as he is said to have made his fortune selling dry goods in the gold fields of California. By 1869 he was back in Newburyport and had erected the present 287 High Street (MHC#1437), a Second Empire-style residence.

On April 30, 1884, the Herald reported that the Dowding property on Pleasant Street had been sold to Eliphalet Griffin at auction for \$5050. The Dowding building apparently remained on the site for several more years before being cut up and removed from the site, reportedly to Joppa.

Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. *If checked, you must attached a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.*

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

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HISTORICAL NARRATIVE (continued):

Floor plans of the Griffin Block are located at the Massachusetts State Archives and indicate that the building was designed by J.M. Littlefield of Haverhill. Littlefield designed many similar brick commercial blocks in the Queen Anne and Panel Brick styles in Haverhill after the 1882 fire in that city. An item in the Herald on 5/16/1889 reported that new iron fronts were being placed into the Griffin Block. In 1890 one of the storefronts was occupied by the Boston Boot & Shoe Company. An illustration of the interior of the store, which was one hundred feet in length, appeared in the local newspaper on October 11, 1890. The other storefront was occupied in 1890 by Kent & Boynton, clothiers and finishers. The 1890 article also includes an illustration of the storefront of Kent & Boynton's. R.S. Margeson was also selling furniture and carpets at 33-35 Pleasant Street in 1890.

As originally constructed there were two stores on the first floor, a series of offices on the second and a large hall measuring 49' x 66' on the third floor. The hall, known as Griffin Hall, occupied the third floor into the 1950s and was the scene of many dances. Moving pictures were briefly shown in Griffin Hall prior to the enactment of a law that move theaters must be on the ground floor that resulted in the construction of the Premier Theater at the rear of 37-39 Pleasant Street in 1908.

The Griffin Block was later owned by Jere Ireland, who later sold it to the Kalman Realty trust. The first floor storefront was occupied by F.W. Woolworth from 1914 until 1949. In 1914 the occupants of the building were listed as a store, offices and hall. In 1949 the Kalman family, owners of the Griffin Block, leased what had been Woolworth's to Boxer's Furniture. In 1953 extensive alterations were made to the building including a modern storefront, a partition between the two first floor stores and an addition at the rear of the building. Two-thirds of the first floor was then occupied by the Clear Weave Hosiery with the remaining third occupied by Boxer's Furniture.

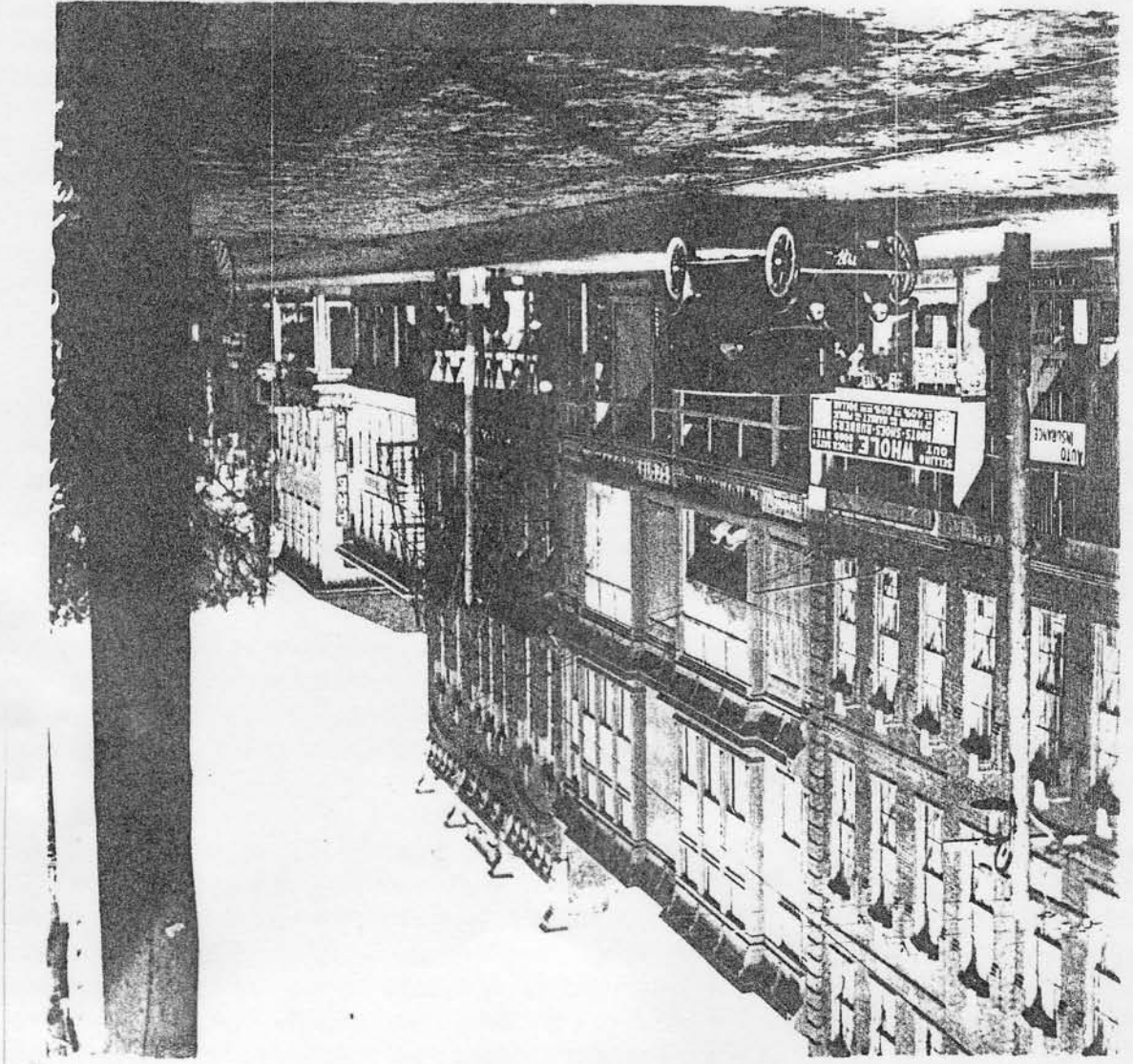
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Maps

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Plan of Newburyport. Philadelphia: H. McIntyre, 1851.
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Source: Newburyport Public Library



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